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C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 000418

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SUBJECT: BLAZE AT MINISTRY OF HEALTH IS OUT, BUT NEW  
ALLEGATIONS KEEP FIRES BURNING

Classified By: CDA Williams for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Testimony in the U.S. trial of a Guyanese drug kingpin, s lawyer alleged that the Minister of Health (and AMCIT) Leslie Ramsammy gave narco-trafficker and death squad leader Shaheed 'Roger' Khan the necessary permission from the GoG to purchase sensitive eavesdropping equipment in Florida. In response to the revelation, opposition members organized a walkout in Parliament and protested the GoG, s continued refusal to investigate allegations related to Khan. This latest accusation against Ramsammy comes two weeks after the Ministry of Health burned down in an arson attack amid rumors of an impending accounting investigation. Both of these events attest to the depth of corruption in the GoG and its inability or unwillingness to address it. END SUMMARY.

TESTIMONY EXPOSES GOG

¶2. (U) Revelation in U.S. court that Guyanese drug kingpin and death squad leader Shaheed Roger, Khan purchased high-tech spy equipment from a Florida firm using a letter signed by Minister of Health Dr. Leslie Ramsammy shook the Guyanese political scene July 30 and 31. The director of Smith Myers, the British manufacturer of the cellular intercept equipment in question, made the accusation during the trial of Khan, s attorney, Robert Simels. Simels is on trial for plotting to kill a witness against Khan. The Smith Myers director stated that while the equipment does not require a U.S. export license as maintained by the GoG, it could only be sold to governments for law enforcement purposes, not individuals. A separate witness also made public Khan, s role in the plot to kidnap the wife of the former DCM at Embassy Georgetown, which led to his curtailment in September 2007.

¶3. (U) The testimony comes as an embarrassment to the GoG, which has maintained it never authorized the purchase of such an apparatus. Guyana Police Force (GPF) in fact seized the equipment in a December 2002 run-in with Khan and several cohorts. As recently as June 2008 President Jagdeo and the Chief of Police maintained the equipment remained safely in GPF custody despite the fact that U.S. authorities found it in Simel, s possession. Since then the GoG has continued to erroneously argue it could not have authorized the purchase because the equipment fell under strict U.S. export controls.

SMOLDERING ISSUES

¶4. (C) Links between Khan, who is suspected in masterminding more than 200 murders in Guyana, and Ramsammy are strong. A close associate of Khan worked with Ramsammy in the Ministry of Health, and the former death squad leader himself is widely rumored to have had regular Saturday meetings with the Minister. While being pursued by U.S. law enforcement in 2006, Khan put Ramsammy, s name forward as a potential mediator between him and the USG.

Ramsammy, who is a U.S. citizen, emphatically denies that he provided a letter giving Khan the GoG,s permission to purchase the equipment, and postulated to Embassy officials that his signature was forged on Ministry of Health letterhead.

15. (U) The current revelation about the Minister of Health follows the channa-bombing,--a Guyanese version of the Molotov cocktail using chick-peas and gasoline--of the Ministry of Health,s main building in the early hours of July 17. The GoG claims it was a politically motivated attack and arrested a number of suspects, some of whom have emerged from police custody with signs of severe mistreatment. However, rumors in Georgetown link the attack to the Khan case, or an accounting investigation at the Ministry.

16. (U) Ramsammy and other high-level GoG officials, connection to Khan have been widely known for years, and the government is believed to have sanctioned Khan,s Phantom, death squad and drug trafficking because it was unable to restore order following a 2002 prison break. The GoG has resisted calls to investigate any allegations related to Khan--though it did ask the Embassy for any information the USG had in the case. Most recently, the Speaker of the National Assembly Ralph Ramkarran disallowed a motion enabling the body to investigate the link between Ramsammy and Khan. In protest the opposition leader hurled a set of law books off his desk and stormed out of Parliament followed by the rest of the opposition. The majority People,s Progressive Party (PPP) responded by using the walkout as an opportunity to pass its version of a local government reform bill without opposition.

#### COMMENT

17. (C) While opposition parties are making noise about the government,s most recent troubles and will likely use the incident to make its case in the run-up to the 2011 presidential elections, some Guyanese greet the disclosures with a frustrated shrug. Jagdeo and the PPP won re-election in 2006 with the Khan issue in the public domain, and the 2011 election will largely hinge on the opposition,s ability to establish credibility with the public. Sentiment is running high against the government, but the lack of an alternative (the leading opposition party is widely seen as just a different version of the same corrupt governance) leave people no place to turn.

18. (C) The more troubling aspect of the continuing fallout of the Khan trials is that it demonstrates the depth of corruption in the current government and its unwillingness or inability to address it. The GoG has made no indication it plans to remove Ramsammy and has resisted every attempt to investigate the depth of Khan,s influence in Guyana. It will likely continue to distance itself from the Khan controversy and focus attention on finding the perpetrators of (or scapegoats for) the Ministry of Health arson attack.

19. (SBU) The Ministry of Health is the largest partner of the Embassy in Guyana and has been key to the PEPFAR program,s success in country to date. Nevertheless, Post is reviewing its relationship with the Ministry in light of the recent allegations and the catastrophic fire. As Jagdeo continues to push for international funding for his Low Carbon Development Strategy and a full Millennium Challenge Account, donor countries should consider the government,s high tolerance for official corruption and Jagdeo,s repeated demonstration that he will not take a stand against it. END COMMENT.  
Williams